CDC's Division of Community Health

Success Stories

Citizen-Led Efforts Focus on Community Health in Idaho

Katie Lamansky

"Three positive things happened as we moved through all the steps of the CHANGE Tool. Making connections in the community, identifying and addressing immediate needs, and finding funding to address some of the needs on the Community Action Plan."

Juanita Aguilar

Summary

Through effective community engagement and the efforts of multiple stakeholders, seven Idaho CHANGE communities are working to improve the health of their citizens. With the support of Idaho Department of Health & Welfare Physical Activity and Nutrition Program staff, a comprehensive health assessment tool was implemented by local public health district staff and community teams to determine health needs and priorities. Communities are working on leveraging funding to implement many of the priorities in their Community Action Plans.

Challenge

Idaho's wide-spread population and diverse geography - ranging from urban/suburban to rural and frontier - can be a barrier to improving health in many communities. Many of Idaho's rural/frontier communities report high rates of chronic disease in addition to low-average incomes. Reduced access to health care services, the lack of physical infrastructure and the human and financial capitol of larger urban areas puts Idaho's small rural communities at a disadvantage.

The Idaho Department of Health & Welfare (IDHW) Physical Activity and Nutrition (IPAN) Program's challenge was assisting the seven public health districts pinpoint areas of high need in their regions. IPAN focuses its efforts on creating healthier communities and improving population health. Without previously identifying the specific needs of Idaho's diverse communities, addressing them in a meaningful way was difficult. IPAN needed a tool to prioritize and address health risk factors in communities.

Solution

The CDC's Community Health Assessment and Group Evaluation (CHANGE) Tool was IPAN's answer. The purpose of CHANGE is to assess existing assets and barriers to good health, in multiple community sectors, specifically schools, worksites, organizations, health care settings and the community at-large.

Funded by the CDC's Healthy Communities Program and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, IPAN Program staff facilitated two workshops in August and November 2011 to train staff and community members from Idaho's seven local public health districts to implement the CHANGE Tool. Health district staff were charged with selecting seven communities to engage in the process by assessing their community and developing a Community Action Plan.

Your Involvement is Key

The CHANGE Tool improves community health by engaging stakeholders and community members. Community health assessments are powerful tools that give the community a voice in expressing their most immediate health needs and priorities. As a community member, you can prioritize what is most important - from healthier school lunches to connecting sidewalks - the choice is yours.

Results

Health district staff were each charged with forming a community team to implement the tool and evaluate their community for improvement. By pulling in members of multiple sectors, diverse teams of stakeholders were formed in each community. While working in rural communities can be a challenge, this project found several advantages. In the three rural communities selected, team members included positions of great influence, including chiefs of police, city leaders, school superintendents, hospital CFO's, and parks and recreation directors.

Priorities have been selected and solutions are being implemented in each CHANGE community, including:

- -Forming a sub-committee to attend city council meetings and advocate for CHANGE priorities;
- -Developing a city-wide worksite wellness program;
- -Creating healthy check-out lines at local grocers;
- -Improving activity time at recess;
- -Connecting walking and bikeways, developing signage for greenways;
- -Addressing tobacco prevention, cessation, and tobacco-free polices; and
- -Developing school and community garden programs.

Future Directions

The CHANGE process brought together stakeholders in each community who otherwise would not likely have found themselves at the same table. We can report positive results in a relatively short timeframe. Three hospitals serving on CHANGE teams received mini-grants from the Idaho Heart Disease and Stroke Program to address heart disease as an Action Plan priority through heart-healthy community-level interventions.

The ultimate goals of the CHANGE process are to:

- Form a sustaining team in each community that continues to focus on community health
- Develop an Action Plan that serves as a guide for implementing purposeful and directed improvements
- Provide strategies and objectives that aid in leveraging funds for implementation

Contact

Katie Lamansky

Idaho Department of Health and Welfare 450 W State St 6th Floor Boise, ID 83702 208-334-4951 phone